

# Reflux

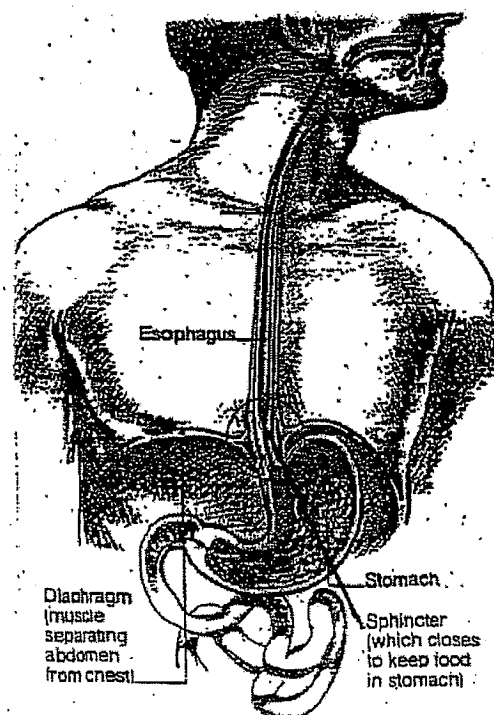


Food, liquid, and saliva travel down a tube called the esophagus, towards your stomach, when you swallow. At the bottom of the esophagus there is a muscle called a “sphincter.” When the sphincter works well, it lets food and liquid into the stomach, without allowing it to flow back from the stomach into the esophagus. Think of it as a one-way valve.

For different reasons, sometimes this muscle does not work well, and stomach contents flow back into the esophagus. The name of this problem is **gastroesophageal reflux**, or “GERD.” If the backward flow travels as high as your voice box, we call it **laryngopharyngeal reflux** or “LPR.” You do not have to feel heartburn to have this condition. Many people with LPR either never get heartburn or get it rarely.

When you reflux, a substance called “pepsin” flows backwards from your stomach and eats away at the tissues it touches. Even worse, pepsin clings to these tissues and becomes reactivated any time you drink or eat something acidic. This can damage your esophagus, throat, and voice box. It can also cause breathing problems, choking episodes, and even cancer. When the backward flow reaches your voice box, it may spill into your airway, damage your lungs, and possibly cause pneumonia.

Symptoms of reflux may include: hoarseness, chronic cough, choking, trouble swallowing, a feeling of a “lump” in your throat, post-nasal drip, and heartburn. But remember, many people with LPR either never get heartburn or get it rarely.



## How can you avoid reflux?

**Medication alone is unlikely to solve the problem. You must also change your diet and lifestyle.**

- Take your anti-reflux medication every day, the following way:
  - Follow the directions on your medication. Some medications must be taken on an empty stomach in order to work
  - It may take 6-8 weeks before you feel the medication working, so be patient
  - The name of your reflux medication is: \_\_\_\_\_
- Stop smoking. Smoking keeps the sphincter muscle from working well.
- Do not go long periods of time without eating.
- Avoid the following foods and liquids:
  - Caffeinated drinks like coffee, espresso, tea, hot chocolate, and some sodas
  - Alcohol
  - Chocolate
  - Mint products like mint candy, mint gum, mint cough drops, and mint tea. Products with menthol and eucalyptus should be avoided, too
  - High fat foods, like fried foods, cheese, butter, and fatty meats
  - Carbonated liquids, like beer and soda, that expand in your stomach
  - Citrus fruits, like grapefruits, lemons, limes, oranges, and their juices
  - Tomatoes, tomato juice, and tomato sauces
  - Onions, garlic, and condiments, like hot sauce, ketchup, salsa, and salad dressings
- Follow these recommendations to reduce backflow:
  - Do not eat large meals. Eat small, regularly-spaced meals instead
  - Do not exercise after a meal
  - Do not wear tight clothes, especially tight pants and belts
- Change your sleeping habits in these ways:
  - Don't lie down right after you eat or drink. Gravity makes it easier for food and liquid to flow backwards when you lie down. **Wait 2-3 hours after eating or drinking to lie down.**
  - If your voice is at its worst first thing in the morning, keep your upper body elevated during sleep. You can do this with a bed wedge. When you use a bed wedge, stomach acid has to travel "uphill" to make its way into your esophagus or voice box.
  - Ask your speech pathologist if a bed wedge is right for you.